

14/11/1999

On Nov 29, I will have no right to gamble with my children's future

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FINALLY, Parliament is dissolved and the general election will be held on Nov 29. For Malaysians who confronted prolonged economic uncertainty and, for the last 14 months, were made to endure political turbulence arising from the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue, it must be a great relief.

In both the economic crisis, which began in July 1997, and the subsequent political agitation, Anwar was the central figure.

In the early days of the economic crisis, opposition parties such as the DAP and their allies from non-governmental organisations, segments of the foreign Press and analysts had much to criticise about the country's leadership. So had Anwar who surreptitiously squirrelled away secret documents and directed his supporters to agitate against Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership.

The economic crisis was a period of great gloom. Nevertheless, many Malaysians continued to have faith that Dr Mahathir would steer the country out of the mess.

Anwar raised interest rates and we had to pay more for our house instalments and loans. Anwar reduced the period for non-performing loans from six months to three months and our banks and businesses ran into problems. Anwar asked his followers to talk about nepotism, cronyism and collusion and we started having fears about political uncertainty.

Then, when he was sacked, the demonstrations began. Before the gloom of economic pain had even begun to lift, we were engulfed in the murkiness of political uncertainty and shades of violence as in Indonesia.

Again, Anwar found his support coming from the DAP, Pas, some of the NGOs and nauseatingly ignorant foreigners such as Al Gore.

But who were the real victims? Ordinary people like us who feared to venture to Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Dataran Merdeka and Kampung Baru on weekends; who had to deal with the stress of a shrinking income and being burdened with threats of violence and riots; who suffered the ignominy of seeing CNBC and CNN and the other foreign Press running down our country daily.

All kinds of lies were told about our country and our people. So much so, with the proliferation of Anwar websites which said the vilest things about our leadership and our country, outsiders thought of us as immoral, corrupt and cruel.

Today, the gloom of economic collapse has been lifted and we are well on the way to full recovery.

But new issues have been raised - arsenic poisoning and inhuman treatment in prisons. And many more raised within the hallowed halls of court which we are not supposed to rebut for fear that Karpal Singh, lawyer and opposition politician, might try to get one cited for contempt.

In the end, what has all this been about? It is not about justice. Nor is it about incorruptibility or abuse of privileges.

It is simply about a frustrated politician's quest for power and the exploitation of this quest by equally bankrupt like-minded opposition politicians.

In the next few weeks, all of us eligible voters will have our moment in the nation's history when we have the power to decide once and for all this power game which has been wrought upon us for the last 30 months.

We can vote for Dr Mahathir's Barisan Nasional or we can vote for this motley, rag-tag team which calls itself the Barisan Alternatif.

Since the age of 16, when I attended my first political rally in 1974, the Barisan Nasional has always come up with the theme of political stability and unity being the way to progress.

Yes, the slogans changed. Clean, Efficient, Trustworthy in 1982, Leadership by Example in 1986 and so on. But the theme was always the same - a vote for the BN is a vote for stability, peace and progress. It was almost becoming tedious and so ho-hum. Until the last two years.

It has been a long time since 1974. I am 41 and a father of four growing children. Come the next general election, my eldest will be eligible to vote as well. The future of this country is the future of my children and how I vote today will determine my progeny's fate.

If I make a wrong decision at this crucial time, my children and theirs will pay for my mistakes.

If the opposition pact labels itself as an alternative, I have to decide whether it really is an alternative in the first place.

What have I and my family seen under Barisan Nasional rule for the last 25 years? Yes, there has been peace. There has been stability. There has been tremendous progress.

Why, even the Communist Party of Malaya, after 50 years, gave up trying to convince us that it was an alternative and Chin Peng and his men surrendered in 1989.

But 30 years of peace and stability have been very monotonous for some. Let us look at the alternative.

I find it hard to imagine Prime Minister Datuk Fadzil Noor waiting at Porto Malai in Langkawi for Datuk Azhar Mansor to return from his round-the-world solo trip. For the life of me, I cannot imagine him hugging Azhar on his return and then talking to Malaysians, rallying them into believing that "Malaysia Boleh".

I cannot imagine Home Minister Lim Kit Siang allowing the opposition Umno Youth from demonstrating against his policy of a Malaysian Malaysia.

I can imagine Lim asking for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Umno Youth protests. I can imagine him predicting election dates or not paying toll but beyond that? I don't know.

I cannot imagine Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail articulating trade issues and locking horns with Madeleine Albright at Apec forums.

I cannot imagine Foreign Minister Karpal Singh extolling the virtues of Malaysia at the UN or international forums or diplomatically tackling issues at Asean meetings.

I cannot imagine a Cabinet where Irene Fernandez, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Prof Syed Hussin Ali, Ezam Nor, Tien Chua or some of their colleagues and lawyers whose names most of us do not know, hold portfolios and manage the country.

They have no experience at all and have never held elected public office. Can these people be an alternative?

I can imagine Ezam squirrelling away secret documents in 30 or 40 different hiding places in the country and in Indonesia but, again, beyond that, I cannot imagine what this inexperienced young man can do to further the cause of the rakyat besides speaking in the same twang and pitch as Anwar.

The last two years have been the longest two years for many Malaysians. We are lucky that we have had a good run for almost three decades.

We are also lucky that we have the power to decide who runs our country for the next five years. We are lucky that unlike some countries, our vote is secret and no one will know how we vote unless we tell them.

In my case, I have weighed the alternatives. I do not want to gamble with what is left of my future. Least of all, I have no right to gamble with my children's future.

Therefore, I do not want my vote to be secret. I want my children to know who I voted for and why.

I do not see the Alternative Front as an alternative. My vote is for the continuity of the peace and harmony of the last 30 years. My vote is for the Barisan Nasional.

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